

THE USE OF BLOGS IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	3,4,5
2. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT	5
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	5, 6
4. EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS OF BLOGS	7,8
5. METHODOLOGY	9-11
6 RESULTS.....	12-22
6.1 THE BLOG EVALUATION.....	12-18
6.2 TEACHER´S MOTIVATION TO CREATE THE BLOG.....	18, 19
6.3 STUDENT´S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE USE OF BLOGS	19-22
7. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH...	23-25
8. APPENDIXES.....	26
9. WORKS CITED.....	27

1. INTRODUCTION

We live in a society of information, communication and knowledge. The importance that new media have acquired in our society is tremendous and teachers need to use new technologies to help students achieve learning objectives. ICTs are transforming education not only in the way of teaching but also in the way of learning. Teachers have to change their communication strategies and assume its role as facilitator of student learning in cooperative environments to help them to achieve educational goals.

ICTs offer the teachers many resources to support teaching (teaching materials, virtual environments, internet, blogs, wikis, webquests, forums, chat, messaging, videos, and other channels of communication and information management) developing creativity, innovation, collaborative work, promoting meaningful, active and flexible learning.

In education, the Internet can be seen as a tool, used to promote interactivity and creativity or to promote communication and collaboration (Chinnery, 2008). Students can assimilate and produce English in plenty of interactive environments, for instance creating dialogues, narrative or short clips. Videos can be used in dictation exercises or gap exercises. Moreover, these projects can be shared by e-mail and feedback is easily provided.

The Internet can also be seen as a source of content where teachers and students have access to different resources and contents to facilitate learning. According to Clarke (1989) the contents can be classified as:

- Authentic materials which are not created for language learning
- Semi- authentic materials which are adapted to second language acquisition.

Moreover, within the official curriculum, the treatment of the “information and **digital competence**” stands out as one of the eight core competencies that must be developed. According to the European Commission (2005: 18), the digital competence refers to: “A skill related to the acquisition, assessment, production, presentation or exchange of information or the possibility of participating in communication networks through the use of the Internet”.

One of the tools which could work to develop this competence, are called *Blogs*. A blog is a website with dated entries, presented in reverse chronological order and published on the internet (Paquet, 2003). Besides, the blog usually includes hyperlinks and other forms of media, such as images and video. These blogs are considered areas of communication and socialization. One of their most important features is the ability of interactivity, allowing the blog posting a monologue or a conversation through comments. For this reason, all these virtual spaces are public, so anyone can read and comment, enriching the experience.

Blogs have a great potential for education. Blogs designed for education are called *edublogs*. These are blogs whose main objective is to support the teaching- learning process in an educational context. According to Ministerio de educación de la República de Argentina (2011), blogs have a number of characteristics that make them particularly useful in the educational process, for instance:

- a) Hypertext and multimedia content. Blogs support all kinds of multimedia files: text, image, audio, video, animations, as well as links to other documents or websites.
- b) Easy to use: contains a very simple and intuitive format to be used in a practical interface, presents pre-designed templates, supports integration of HTML codes for multimedia production and it is also possible to publish a post via email or SMS.
- c) Chronological and thematic organization of information. The content is organized chronologically and each post generates a permanent link.
- d) Exchange of ideas. Blogs encourage participation in different languages, exchange of ideas, various sources of information, different views on the same subject, integration of examples, participation in collaborative projects which leads students to create a constructive vision of language.

Nowadays, edublogs are commonly used in education; this is the case of Utebo School of languages where I implemented my teacher's placement. So that, the purpose of this project is to evaluate the use of blogs in Utebo School of Languages due to the fact that blogs are widely used in the school and are a very important tool for language acquisition. I focused especially on the blog addressed to second intermediate level, because it was the course in which I implemented my unit. This blog is a transmissive one, also called teacher's blog, where the teacher posts activities and links and students

are only visitors. There is no cooperation, students cannot express their opinions or give ideas. The class is composed of approximately 20 students; all of them are adult learners who want to get a B2 title.

The blog may contribute to fulfilling the objectives set out by the Official Curriculum for the Intermediate level. The intermediate level has as main purpose to use the language with some certainty and flexibility, responsive and productive, both orally and in writing, and to mediate between speakers of different languages, in everyday situations requiring understanding and producing texts in standard language, using common structures and formal lexicon linguistic repertoire that deal with general, everyday or personal interests.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

This project provides a theoretical justification for the use of blogging in the context of the EFL classroom. It also describes the educational benefits of the activities implemented in the blog as well as the findings from the attitudinal survey of nine students.

Therefore, the **objectives** of this project are:

- 1) To create an instrument to assess blogs for language learning.
- 2) To use this tool to assess one of the blogs used in Utebo School of languages and to propose possible improvements
- 3) To analyze the attitude of students towards the use of blogs.
- 4) To analyze the motivation of teachers to create blogs.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Blogs can be used as a tool so that students create content and build knowledge. Blogging enhances the skills of students while learning a second language, in this case in the context of EFL. The potential of blogs for language learning is important and students should be convinced that they can really benefit from this tool. There are

numerous options for blogs, based on the objectives set for them. In the context of English as a Foreign Language, blogs can be found for professional development. According to Casado Ortiz (2003), there are different types of educational blogs:

Transmissive Blogs: as electronic whiteboard

These blogs are in the hands of the teacher to post links, instructions, conclusions or activities carried out during the development of the course (among other applications). Moreover, productions of the participants of the course or program can be published, called portfolios of individual or group work

Interactive Blogs: Blogging as individual production

Basically in the hands of each student, also called students blogs. They publish their projects and research, as well as records of their actions, methods and achievements in the process of research and creation. In this type of blog, the selection criteria, publication and evaluation are essential to organize the educational act, and uses different formats for presenting information (text, images, audio, video, animations, etc.).

Collaborative Blogs: as networks of creation

It is a form of production in the hands of the study group, in which each member contributes in the final document. It is further supported by publishers, production tools and online social networks that allow enrichment of the experience.

It is also possible to create mixed blogs blending different forms of participation, so that you can find: mostly transmissive blogs by incorporating collaborative strategies or transmissive blogs that include links to blogs of individual production, and so on.

In this respect, exploiting the potential of blogs for language learning is directly related to understanding the pedagogical benefits of such a tool, as well as the students and teachers perception of its value in the learning process. As noted Glogowsky (2008) in his post on BlogTalk: "Blogging is not about choosing a topic and write the answers to the rest of the term. This is significant, serious engagement with ideas"

4. EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS OF BLOGS

Blogs have lots of benefits, as pointed out by learning specialists Fernet and Brock Eide and cited by Richardson (2006) These include the following:

- Critical and analytical thinking is promoted, as well as creative, intuitive and associational thinking.
- Blogs are a good tool for exchanging ideas and also as a resource of commenting ideas.
- Quality information is provided in blogs.
- Blogs also promote social interaction.

Students can demonstrate a critical thought, take creative risks, and do a sophisticated use of the elements of the language through blogs. Thus, the students acquire creative, critical, communicative and collaborative skills that can be useful for their academic future. The increasing popularity of the blogs suggests the possibility that some of the works that the students need to be able to read well, to answer critically and to write vigorously might be achieved in circumstances radically different from those who nowadays are in use in the higher education.

Why using blogs in the EFL classroom?

There are two types of blogs which are relevant in the EFL classroom:

- a) Blogs as a tool for students to write and collaborate between them.
- b) Blogs as a source of content to propose access to different online contents.

Therefore, the public and interactive nature of blogs is fundamental to understand the socializing potential of blogs (Tiscar Lara, 2005). Hence, participants can receive feedback from others and become more aware of their ability to speak languages. The more comments the blog has, the more motivated students to continue writing, or to correct and improve their work based on these reviews.

As regards the context of the EFL classroom, blogs are very useful for practising the four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking, due to the fact that there is plenty of material available online. Moreover, blogs are a source of writing material, for instance, writing activities and peer reviewing.

According to DOTS (2011), the use of blogs in second language acquisition has many advantages:

- 1) To publish students content
- 2) To increase motivation and fluency
- 3) To interact with peers and promote cooperative learning.
- 4) To create opportunities outside the classroom
- 5) To reflect and evaluate their learning
- 6) To collect all the material and resources as a portfolio

Therefore, the current project focuses on **classroom blogs**, also called transmissive blogs where the teacher publishes tasks and educational activities to promote the use of the second language as a tool for publishing content. Teachers can use blogs to reach out students in a new and attractive way without having to limit teaching to face-to-face instruction. For instance, different materials can be published immediately, allowing access to information or resources to carry out projects and classroom activities, optimizing the class time. Blogs offer the students the opportunity to improve their knowledge through various elements such as videos, sounds, images or games.

Vidal (2006) argues that blogs promote motivation because they make the students active participants in the educational process. They can write, share ideas, work in teams, design, visualize instantly what they produce, etc, always guided by the teacher, acting as a facilitator of learning.

More to the point, there is a considerable evidence that participants become more and responsible for their own development (Vidal, 2006) which is one of the objectives stated by the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), specifically known as “Learning to learn”.

5. METHODOLOGY

The first step was to design an evaluation tool to analyze and evaluate the use of blogs for language learning. The criteria used to evaluate the blogs are as follows:

Qualities	Questions
Integration with face to face teaching	Is the blog a complement to face to face teaching? Are the contents of the blog integrated with classroom teaching?
Teaching process	Does the blog facilitate the teaching process?
Learning of new concepts	Does the blog help in explaining new concepts?
Motivation	Does the blog make learning more exciting and motivating?
Learner encouragement	Does the blog encourage the student to know more?
Impact on the learner	Does the blog make students understand better and recall lessons taught during their absence?
Cooperative learning	Does the blog make learning more participative and encourage group learning?
Interaction	Does the blog support interaction?
English skills	Are the four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) equally treated?

Here I will explain these questions in more detail:

Is the blog a complement to face to face teaching? Are the contents of the blog integrated with classroom teaching?

I will analyse whether the activities in the blogs reinforce, complement, and elaborate on the activities in the classroom and are designed to take advantage of the features of the online medium to achieve the objectives of the unit.

Does the blog facilitate the teaching process?

I will analyse whether the blog helps the teacher to develop her lessons and to what extent it is integrated.

Does the blog help in explaining new concepts?

In this section I will discuss the power of the blog to explain new concepts. I mean if the blog really helps to understand new concepts learned in class, such as grammatical contents.

Does the blog make learning more exciting and motivating?

At this point I will focus on investigating whether the activities which the blogs has are motivating or not, taking into account what motivation is for adult learners.

Does the blog encourage the student to know more?

From my point of view, this section is one of the most important because I will analyze in depth the use of blogs and whether they really encourage students to learn more, in other words, whether blogs really help the learning process.

Does the blog make students understand better and recall lessons taught during their absence?

Considering that the centre is a School of languages and attendance is not compulsory, I will analyze the effectiveness of the blog to cover possible deficiencies of students who cannot attend lessons.

Does the blog make learning more participative and encourage group learning?

This point is also very important to know the use of blogs in language teaching. I want to inquire whether the blog is only led by the teacher or otherwise the students also participate, providing activities and ideas in it, thus promoting teamwork and cooperative learning.

Does the blog support interaction?

I intend to analyze whether the blog provides students' interaction. Thus, I will analyze the different sections and activities within the blog, noticing whether the blog promotes interaction among students.

Are the four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) equally treated?

This is definitely something very important when learning English. I will analyze the blog noticing whether the four skills are equally treated or there is one that dominates the other.

As a second step, I have asked to the teacher who created the blog some questions in order to know its uses and opinions about it:

- 1) Why did you create the blog?
- 2) What is the main relation with the activities from the blog and the classroom activities?
- 3) What is its main use?
- 4) Which materials do you decide to include? Why?
- 5) In your opinion, What are its main advantages?
- 6) Is the blog useful for the students? Why?
- 7) Which are the main problems of the blog?

Thirdly, I gave to the students a survey about the use of blogs to record their opinions and feelings¹.

¹ See Appendix

6. RESULTS

6.1. The blog evaluation

The blog is public and everybody has access to it: <http://maripazintermedio2.blogspot.com.es/>. This is the general aesthetic of the blog:



I will present here the results of the evaluation.

Is the blog a complement to face to face teaching? Are the contents of the blog integrated with classroom teaching?

To answer this question, I have looked at the contents themselves. In the blog, different labels can be found which link with the posts. For instance: *Advertising, Books and reading, British and American English, Celebrations, Celebrities, Christmas, Cinema, Cities, Clothes and fashion, Complaining, Culture, Daily Horoscope, Discussion, Education, Education and learning, Endangered Species, Environment, Fashion, Festivals and festivities, food, food and restaurants, free time, Genre, Grammar, Happiness, Health, Hobbies, Holidays, Homework, Houses, Idioms, Improve writing, Learning languages, Lifestyles, Listen and read, Listening, monologue, muestras examen, music, National news, News, On this day, Pets, Phrasal verbs, Pronunciation,*

Reading, Relationships, Revision online, Sample exams, Shopping, Songs, Speaking, Sport, Technology, The media, The Press, Transport, Travel, Video, Vocabulary, Watch and read, Weather, Work and Yellow Press.

All these headlines contain different related posts that may be related to the contents of the year and stated by the Official Curriculum. Therefore, we could say that the contents in the blog are integrated with classroom teaching and also with the guidelines that the Official Curriculum states.

Does the blog facilitate the teaching process?

In some way, the blog may facilitate the teaching process, because if something is not clear during the lesson, it may be revised in the blog. In addition, there are many links and other online activities that facilitate the teaching process because the teacher does not need to create her own activities. For instance, as regards the grammar part, there are several links to different websites to practise their grammar skills.

The screenshot shows the BBC Learning English website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like Home, News, Sport, Radio, TV, and Weather. Below this is a banner for 'BBC LEARNING ENGLISH' with the tagline 'Inspiring language learners for 70 years'. The main content area is titled 'Learning English - The Flatmates' and features a cartoon illustration of four characters. The current lesson is 'Language Point 184: Expressions with 'hand' and 'foot''. The text explains that there are many English expressions, idioms, and proverbs related to hands and feet, using the example of 'waited on hand and foot'. It then provides a list of common expressions using hands and feet, such as 'hand in glove' and 'sleight of hand'. On the right side, there's a 'Most Recent' section with links to 'Last 3 episodes', 'Last 3 language points', and 'Last 3 quizzes'. At the bottom, there are buttons for 'What's next?', 'The quiz', 'Go back', 'The episode', 'Download this page', and 'More on this topic'.

Some of the websites to which there are links are the following:

- *Oxford Practice Grammar*
- *Oxford Living Grammar*
- *Grammar challenge BBC learning*
- *The flatmates: language point*
- *Quick grammar reference British Council*
- *Grammar exercises British Council*
- *ESL- Lounge for students*

These links are very useful when learning grammar and they are available online directly from the blog.

Does the blog help in explaining new concepts?

I think this point is one of the most lacking in the blog. It is true that there are many links and grammar exercises to practice, but no theory. Therefore, if a student was unable to attend the lesson, it cannot see the explanation or concept in the blog because only the exercises are provided. Although there is a link previously mentioned, the *Quick grammar reference British Council* where some grammar concepts are explained:



However, from my point of view they are not clear at all, the teacher should integrate some posts related to the unit they are studying in the lesson and the related grammar

explanation. Adult learners are especially interested in grammar contents because they are used to this way of teaching.

For instance, I would include something similar as follows:

Unit 1: Leisure and entertainment

- a) Vocabulary: Hobbies and leisure
- b) Grammar: the use of infinitives and –ing forms: Explanation and exercises
- c) Reading materials: Strange hobbies
- d) Pronunciation: Questions tags
- e) Speaking: Describe the pictures

Does the blog make learning more exciting and motivating?

Firstly, to answer this question I am going to concentrate on what is motivation for adult learners. If students do not feel motivated, the first thing to do is focus on the reasons for learning English:

- Why are they learning English?
- Would they like to use the language in other countries?

Another of the main reasons may be, to understand the movies and read books in their original language, or having a good knowledge of English for their employment.

Doing funny activities, learning is much easier. It is often thought that learning a language is acquiring a lot of memorizing vocabulary and grammar, it can easily explain one of the reasons that the motivation for learning is lost; however, this is not the best way to learn a language.

To make learning more varied and less monotonous, different materials and different media resources should be integrated in the blog. Moreover, teachers should introduce the practice of language in everyday life. For example, daily newspapers, movies in original language or blogs from other countries. This, will improve their understanding of the language and they would also discover interesting things about the country and its people.

Regarding all the resources that appear in the blog, I notice a tremendous lack of interesting and motivating activities. As I have already mentioned, motivation for adult learners is strictly related to the use of real materials, movies and articles from newspapers. However, this is something that really lacks in the blog for second intermediate level. It is true that there are plenty of grammar exercises, readings and useful websites when learning a language. In my opinion, the blog follows a very traditional way of teaching.

Recent studies of second language acquisition support the use of realia, movies and different attractive activities. According to Sanderson (1999): “Authentic materials keep students informed about what is happening in the world, so they have an intrinsic educational value. As teachers, we are educators working within the school system, so education and general development are part of our responsibilities”. However, this blog pays all the attention to grammar and there is a lack of real listening and real speaking situations, in which students could learn how the language is used in real contexts.

Does the blog encourage the student to know more?

Students have free access to the blog and as I have already commented that there are plenty of materials available online. There is no doubt that if the student frequently access the blog, their learning experience would improve a lot. Moreover, there is a part inside the blog which is called *Information to the student*, where they are able to complete a checklist from the *European Portfolio of Languages* and reflect on their learning (see following page).

This is a self- evaluation tool where students could think about their progress and answer questions such as

- I can understand essential details of recorded messages and public announcements; for instance, in an answering machine or in airports, stations, etc.;
- I can understand simple technical information, such as operating instructions for a telephone card.

This tool is not used in the class, so that it would be very useful for their learning experience.



Self-assessment Checklist

Level **B1**

Form 8.3
Biography

Language: _____

Tick ✓ what you think you can do in column 1.
Use column 2 to tick ✓ what you are not able to do yet but consider necessary.
If you have ticked more than **80% in column 1**, you have probably reached **Level B1**.
You can use the blank spaces at the end of each section to add any descriptor that shows what you can do or hope to be able to do.

	I can	My aims
Listening  Provided speech is relatively slow, clear and in standard language and/or the information can be repeated or stated clearly...	1	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can understand essential details of recorded messages and public announcements; for instance, in an answering machine or in airports, stations, etc.; I can understand simple technical information, such as operating instructions for a telephone card; I can follow and take part in a conversation on everyday issues or topics of general interest; I can grasp the essentials of an extended conversation taking place in my presence; I can understand the details of what is said in common exchanges and negotiations, e.g. changing a faulty item; I can broadly understand the essentials of short and simple presentations, provided the topic is familiar; I can understand the main points in TV programmes of my interest; I can grasp the essentials of radio news programmes; 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Reading  Provided I can reread or use a dictionary if needed...	1	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can understand the most relevant information in brief texts such as signs, labels or menus; I can understand notes with information and instructions of everyday life in the personal or professional field; I can understand personal letters describing facts and expressing feelings and wishes; I can understand relevant information in simple formal letters from banks, universities, etc.; I can understand most relevant information in brochures, leaflets or handbooks; I can find, after a quick reading, specific information in short texts such as news in brief; for example, who did what and where; I can understand the main points in short press articles on well-known topics or current affairs; I can understand the main points in magazine or newspaper articles or interviews in which someone takes a stand on a current topic; I can understand the plot of a clearly structured story or tale and identify the most important episodes and events; 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Does the blog make the students understand better and recall lessons taught during their absence?

To answer this question, I have looked at all the activities which appear in the blog, especially the units which I observed during my Practicum and the exercises are not the same as the ones which appear in the blog.

I think that the activities which appear in the blog are extra- activities to supply the necessities of the students or to revise concepts that were not clear. However, there is not a part which includes a diary of the activities and concepts taught in class.

In my opinion a diary should be included in the blog to make students aware of the topics learnt in the lesson during their absence. For instance:

This way, students could ask for the worksheets they do not have and do the activities at home.

Does the blog make learning more participative and encourage group learning? Does the blog support interaction?

As I have already commented in the theoretical framework, there are different kinds of edublogs. In this research I only concentrate on a teacher's blog, which is a blog created

by the teacher and controlled by the teacher. There is no option of collaboration and interaction between students. For that reason, the blogs does not encourage group learning or interaction.

From my point of view, the teacher should change the blog and add a forum for students to share their ideas or create another blog controlled by the students. In addition, the forums and debates would make the students informed of all that is relevant in the world of learning a second language, along with videos, photos and events to help them in their learning process. This would help them to become future spectators while critics consolidate and acquire linguistic and cultural knowledge.

Are the four skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening equally treated?

My first hypothesis was that all the skills were perfectly integrated in the blog. However, after giving the survey to the students I realised that none of them mentioned anything about the reading activities. For that reason, I explored the blog and I discovered that there was a part which was called *Reading and writing*. In this section, there were no reading activities at all, there were only three links:

- *Reading exercises: Identify specific information, British Council*
- *Yellow Press*
- *Hello magazine*

The first one could not be found and the other two were links to different magazines. I suppose that students do not like this section because they cannot find reading exercises similar to the ones in the exam. Therefore, I would include typical reading exercises and related to the units taught in the lessons.

6.2. Teacher's motivation to create the blog

According to the teacher (the blogger) the blog was created to fulfil the necessities of the students. She noticed that there was a lack of information in the books and the materials she gave to the students in class. For that reason, she complemented her teaching with the activities in the blog. Her main objective was clearly to use the Internet as source of materials. The tremendous range of activities that the internet

provided helped her to propose the exercises and activities and she also made sure that the students were covered with all they needed.

The relation between the activities from the blog and the ones in the classroom is not clear. Inside the blog, there are several headlines, like: *entertainment, sports, health and fitness etc.* which are related to the topics given in class. However, they are not in chronological order and it can be distracting for students. Normally, all the exercises and resources provided in the blog are studied in the class, so they are complement to classroom teaching. For the teacher, the main advantage is that during the lesson she has not got enough time to cover everything. For that reason, she includes different links and materials such as grammar activities, listening etc to cover the lack of time.

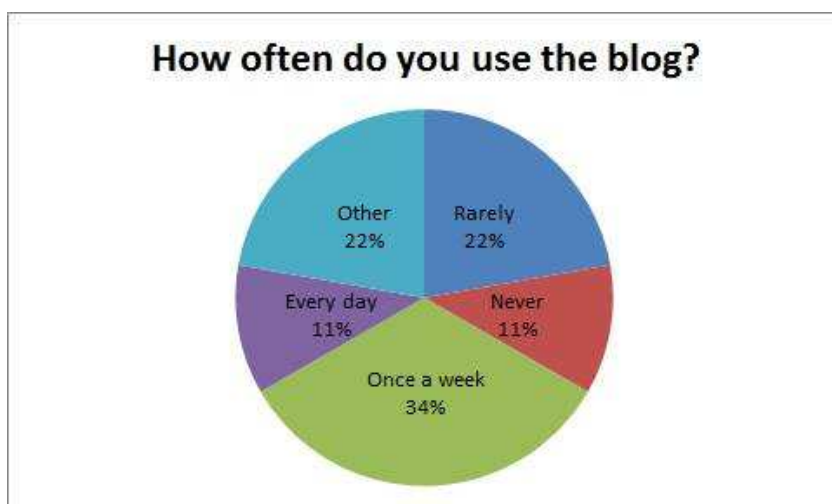
The teacher also pointed out the fact that in Utebo School of Languages blogs are used to approach students in new ways, without having to limit exclusively to classroom interaction. For example, publishing materials and allowing immediate access to information or resources to carry out classroom activities, optimizing time. It also offers students the opportunity to improve their learning experience, enriching them with multimedia elements such as video, sound, images, animations.

In contrast, she also thinks that she could enrich the blog much more. However, she has no time to do it. Owing to the fact that the students are worried about the final exam, she also thinks that she could include some clues and mock exams. However, this is something that she tries to cover during the lessons. Apart from that, the teacher also thinks that the blog has some disadvantages. For instance:

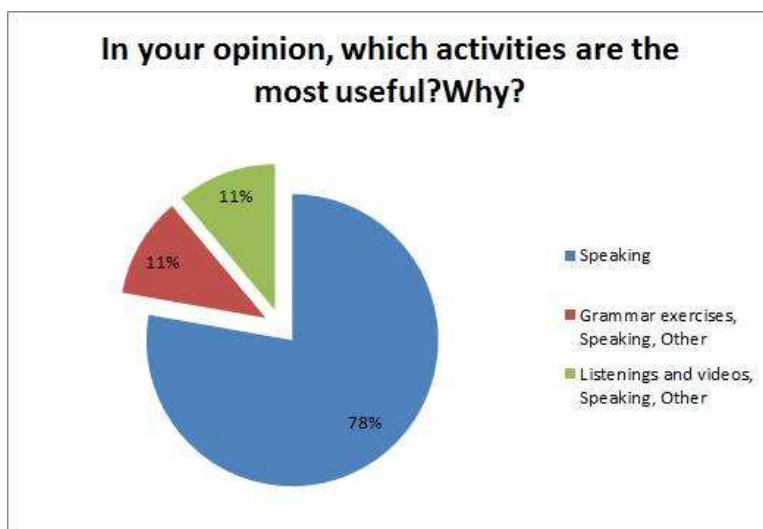
1. It is an unstable system and the teacher should democratize this tool.
2. The continuous evolution of the tool makes the teacher constantly open to change and this implies lot of effort.
3. Risk of becoming a replica of the dynamics of the textbooks.
4. Risk of increasing the gap between proficient and non-proficient students.
5. Blogs are not suitable for very large or complex content; in this case it would be better to use a wiki.

6.3. Student's attitude towards the use of blogs in language teaching:

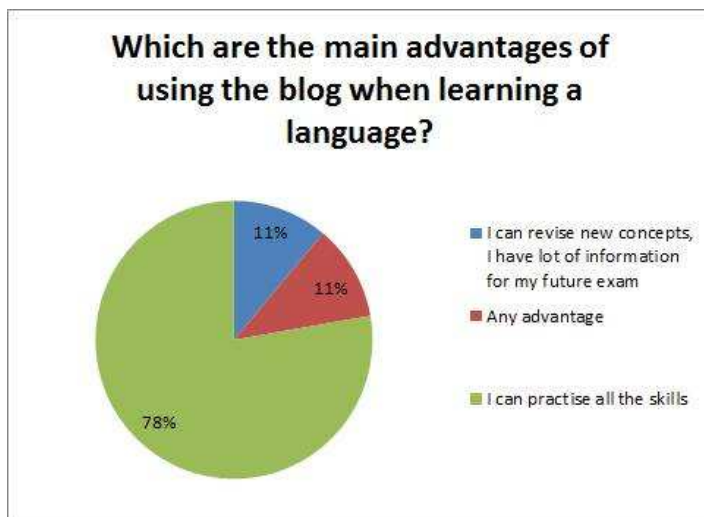
The survey results are as follows:



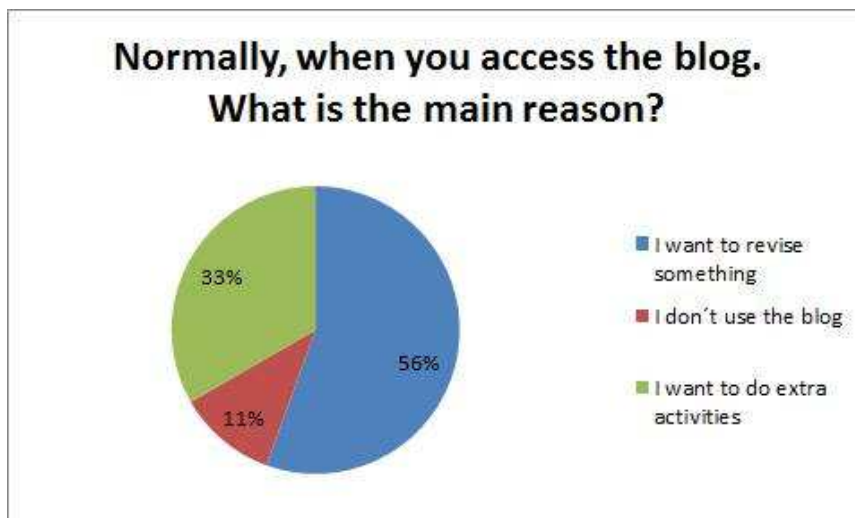
As regards the frequency of use, the majority of the students use the blog once a week and only the 11% of students never access to it.



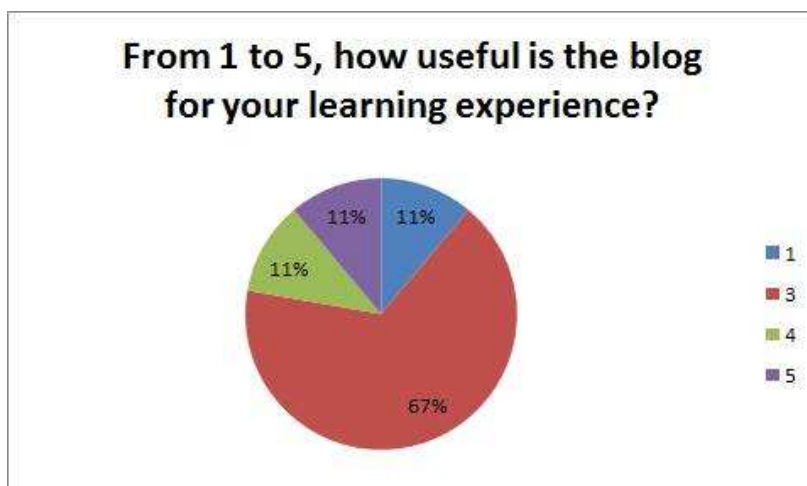
All students agree that the best activities of the blog are listenings and videos, grammar exercises and speaking. None of them think that reading activities are also very useful for their learning experience. Another important point is that the main advantage of using the blog for them is to practise skills and revise new concepts.



The main reason for accessing the blogs is to revise content and to do extra- activities:



All in all, the blog seems to be useful for the students, as the graphic shows:



However, I noticed that they do not feel enthusiastic at all. Perhaps this is because they are extremely worried about the exam and they consider they would need more activities to practise.

Apart from the survey, I also collected student's opinions during the Practicum about the negative aspects of the blog. Some of the students were not very good at using ICTs and they thought that the structure of the blog did not help much. One of the key elements of blogging is its system of publication in reverse chronological order. This feature can be very useful for teachers who want to provide a regular update on new content. However, for the teaching process, this method requires a fragmented track in reverse order that may confuse students less familiar with the system. For these cases, it may be more effective to separate the documents and their integration into the blog as teaching materials through a hyperlink. This is the key point of the blog, and where all the problem lies. It turns out that the chronological order is almost never the most important in the development of the teaching task. Even though it may be useful in some cases the reality is that most of the time this is not the ideal way to work.

Moreover, blogs always show the latest articles published. Depending on the number of papers presented, they soon end up buried among dozens of other items, which together with the lack of other structure is really bad to find information. Unless you know in advance what you are looking for.

The students also point out the idea that blogs in Utebo School of languages are restricted collaborative systems. They are only held by the teacher who writes the articles. Students would need a discussion forum to provide their views or questions. However, there is no mechanism to help in creating work together. So that, it is not an effective system when it is intended to work cooperatively.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This project has presented a research on blogging in English language teaching and learning, especially in a School of languages. As demonstrated by the evaluation of the blog, the student's survey and the interview with the teacher, they respond positively; however, some features could be changed in order to improve its quality.

Three features of blogging seem to be relevant in the school:

- 1) Its innovative and motivating power.
- 2) The facilitation of the learning experience.
- 3) The capacity of students to work autonomously.

Although this research was carried out in small scale, the use of blogs seems to help to develop students' language skills. The results of the survey given to the students are important for a number of reasons. First, the percentage of students that seem to access the blog is high, although they do not access every day. Therefore, we could reach the conclusion that the blog is used but for some specific issues not for a daily use. For that reason, some aspects of the blog should be changed in order to increase the motivation of students to access to it. Moreover, from the survey we also deduce that all the skills are not equally treated and students only access to the blog to revise concepts or do extra activities, there is no option of knowing what is done in class during their absence.

My personal evaluation of the blog was also very useful to notice the main weaknesses of the blog. There is a lack of real resources and activities for the final exam, as well as an excess of grammar typical from a traditional way of teaching. The teacher created the blog to fulfil her lack of time in the lessons and there are lots of links from grammar websites in the blog but not funny or motivating activities for students.

Thanks to the evaluation of the blog, the survey to the students and the interview with the teacher, I have come to the conclusion that a good blog of languages should contain the following:

•**Clear and attractive aesthetic:** the blog in Utebo School of languages is very austere and there are no images to support the content. I think that visual aid encourage and motivate the students to learn better. For instance, I have created a blog of languages

which only has three posts but where you can see the general view of the blog and the kind of activities which appear within it: <http://martaromoenglish.blogspot.com.es/>

- **Activities similar to the ones in the exam:** taking into account the context, this would be very useful for adult learners especially in a School of languages because student's main aim is to get the title and pass the exam. For that reason, I would include a section with typical reading, speaking, writing and listening activities for the final exam.

- **The four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking** should be integrated and equally treated. I would include activities and resources of all kinds and apart from links to websites I would also include activities and information within the blog. For instance, information about the English culture or about the advantages of the use of blogs in the EFL classroom.

- **Some theory about the grammar concepts learnt in class.** In Utebo School of languages, grammar is very important taking into account the context. For that reason, apart from typical grammar activities I would also include some theory to explain the new concepts taught in class.

- **The use of real material.** Although in Utebo School of languages, the teacher only provides some useful links such as BBC news, British Council, etc to watch clips or read articles but she does not select the ones that are more important for their students. So that, I would select the best real listenings and readings for my students to make them aware of different accents, speakers and also to make them aware of the use of the English language in real contexts situations.

- **A diary of the classroom.** Owing to the fact that attendance is not compulsory at the school I would include a diary where the students could see the contents taught during the lesson and they were not lost. For instance:

DIARY

Monday 14th January: Exercise 1 and 2 from the Students book, page 23.

Listening from the BBC : <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p011t5k8>

Speaking interaction worksheet given by the teacher

• **The necessity to include a forum or a chatroom.** I am totally in favour of collaborative blogs where students make their own posts and contents. However, this is another type of blog, which is called student's blog and in this case we are analyzing the teacher's blog. Therefore, to improve the quality of the blog and to encourage cooperative learning, I would include a forum or a chatroom to make the students able to post comments, activities and useful websites. In that case, students would be at some point responsible of their own learning, always guided by the teacher.

For future research, it would be important to analyze methodologically how students' language learning is impacted thanks to the use of blogging. In addition, the content, the grammar and organization in general should be examined in order to know how important learners of languages consider the blog for the acquisition of the language. Finally, other forms of ICTs, such as social networks: Facebook, Twitter, etc could be used in an EFL classroom integrated with blogging and face-to-face teaching.

APPENDIX

The use of blogs in the EFL classroom

***Obligatorio**

How often do you use the blog? *

In your opinion, which activities are the most useful? Why? *

- ☐ ☐ Listenings and videos
- ☐ ☐ Reading
- ☐ ☐ Grammar exercises
- ☐ ☐ Speaking
- ☐ ☐ Other

Which are the main advantages of using the blog when learning a language? *

- ☐ ☐ I can revise new concepts
- ☐ ☐ If I don't understand something, the blog has the solution
- ☐ ☐ I can practise all the skills
- ☐ ☐ I have lot of information for my future exam
- ☐ ☐ No advantage
- ☐ ☐ Other:
- ☐
- ☐

Normally, when you access the blog. What is the main reason? *

- ☐ ☐ I haven't attended the lesson
- ☐ ☐ I want to revise something
- ☐ ☐ I want to do extra activities
- ☐ ☐ Otro:
- ☐

If you were able to change something from the blog, which aspects would you improve? Why? *

From 1 to 5, how useful is the blog for your learning experience? *

1 2 3 4 5

Comments and opinions: *

9. WORKS CITED

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